DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 351 373 TM 019 197

AUTHOR	Abbott, Jeannie, Comp.
TITLE	Primary Assessment Program Writing Moderation Booklets: A Report of the Survey of their Usage and Usefulness.
INSTITUTION	Northern Territory Dept. of Education, Darwin (Australia).
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-7245-2583-1
PUB DATE	91
NOTE	19p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Comparative Analysis; Educational Assessment; *Elementary School Teachers; Evaluation Utilization; Foreign Countries; Grade 5; Grade 7; *Grading; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; Mail Surveys; Questionnaires; *Student Evaluation; *Teacher Attitudes; Writing Achievement; *Writing Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS	*Australia (Northern Territory); Consensus Moderation; Teacher Surveys; Writing Samples

ABSTRACT

To determine the appropriateness of existing writing assessment instruments, to set directions for future assessment, and to ensure that assessment instruments are consistent with the requirements of the new English curriculum of the Northern Territory (Australia), teachers were sampled to determine how they used the booklets of moderated writing samples in 1991 and to gain other information about their regard for the moderated writing samples. A survey questionnaire was sent to teachers in years 5 and 7 in 71 schools and to various administration officials. A total of 86 teachers responded. Teachers believed, as they had in a 1989 survey, that the booklets containing the moderated samples and the framework of descriptors provided for assessment are useful resources for assessment of student writing. Nevertheless, many teachers did not know of or did not have access to the booklets. Year-7 teachers made more use of the booklets than did Year-5 teachers. Informal discussions made it clear that teachers are interested in having access to collections of moderated samples of early childhood student writing. With full implementation of the new curriculum and annual system-wide moderation of student writing at years 5 and 7, use of the moderated samples will probably increase. The booklet survey is included. (SLD)

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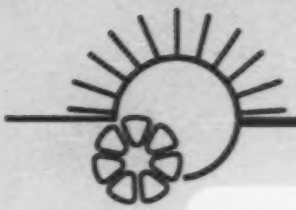

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Primary Assessment Program Writing Moderation Booklets: A Report of the Survey of their Usage and Usefulness

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Primary Assessment Program Writing Moderation Booklets: A Report of the Survey of their Usage and Usefulness

Northern Territory Department of Education
Darwin 1991

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ISBN 0 7245 2583 1

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Acknowledgment is given to the schools that assisted with this survey, and to the individual respondents who provided data and information.

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Printed by the Educational Resources Section
of the Northern Territory Department of Education
December 1991
P&P91/1444–120

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Primary Assessment Program writing moderation booklets : a report of the survey of their usage and usefulness / (research conducted and report compiled by Jeannie Abbot). Darwin : Northern Territory Dept. of Education, 1991.

13 p. ; 30 cm.
At head of title: PAP Primary Assessment Program.

ISBN 0724525831 : C.I.P.

1. English Language – Composition and exercises – Study and teaching (Primary) – Northern Territory. I. Abbott, Jeannie. II. Northern Territory. Dept. of Education. III. Northern Territory Primary Assessment Program.

372.6 20

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BACKGROUND

When the Primary Assessment Program began, three types of assessment procedures in Reading and Writing were put in place. The method that was agreed to for the assessment of students' writing at Years 5 and 7 was that of 'moderation'. This meant that assessment instruments were to be developed for teachers to use to assess their students' written expression.

In 1983, 1987 and 1989, samples of writing produced by Northern Territory urban students at Years 5 and 7 were assessed by teachers according to 'frameworks of descriptors' for various genres and then submitted for system-wide moderation by a panel of school and office-based teachers.

Booklets containing the annotated samples, classified in bands of *Low*, *Satisfactory* and *High* levels of competency, were produced for use by teachers as 'benchmark' assessment instruments. The genres covered were:

- 1983 Narrative (literary genre)
- 1987 Narrative (literary genre) and report (non-literary genre)
- 1989 Argument and Explanation (non-literary genres).

In 1991, a 'framework of descriptors' for assessing narrative poetry in ballad form was developed and included in an information booklet which was circulated to all urban primary schools. Teachers assessed the poems produced by their students and submitted them for system-wide moderation. A selection of these samples was included in the booklet which will become available for teachers to use as an assessment instrument beginning in 1992.

With the exception of an evaluation of the Primary Assessment Program namely, *The Primary Assessment Program: A Descriptive Study Incorporating Teacher Perceptions* (Richards, 1989), the extent of the use made of the booklets over the years has been unmeasured and therefore largely unknown.

In 1990, the NT Board of Studies endorsed the Primary Assessment Committee's recommendation that some form of system-wide moderation of students' writing take place annually from 1991.

As this is now current policy, it means that longer term strategic planning for writing assessment at Years 5 and 7 is necessary. It was considered essential that teachers be given an opportunity to have input into this process. With the mandatory introduction of the new T–10 English curriculum in 1992, it is timely that past practice be considered and future direction set.

PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

In order to determine the appropriateness of existing writing assessment instruments, to set direction for the development of future instruments that continue to meet the needs of teachers, and to ensure that the 'instruments' are consistent with requirements of the new T–10 English curriculum, there was a

need to consult with all teachers of Years 5 and 7 in urban primary schools. This consultation process sought to:

- determine the use teachers made of each booklet of moderated samples of student writing during 1991
- quantify the extent to which teachers used (in 1991) the 'frameworks of descriptors' in each of the genres associated with the moderated writing samples
- gain information about teachers' assessments of the usefulness of the booklets of sample scripts and the 'frameworks of descriptors'
- find out what additional genres (if any) teachers would wish to see moderated for the purposes of constructing more booklets of samples
- gain from teachers any additional comments and suggestions that would enhance the formal writing assessment process.

AIMS OF THE SURVEY

The data and information that was gathered from schools will be used to:

- assess whether or not the existing booklets of moderated samples of writing and the 'frameworks of descriptors' are still considered by teachers to be relevant and useful
- set direction for future system-wide writing assessment at Years 5 and 7.

LIMITATIONS

Constraints imposed by limited time and human resources did not allow interviews to be conducted with individual teachers, therefore the survey questionnaire was the only method of data collection.

As the size of the Year 5/7 teacher population was not determined in this survey, it was not possible to quantify the precise proportion of the population accounted for by the responses received.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

A survey questionnaire (see Appendix) was developed and field trialled on a sample of six teachers in schools and six officers of the Curriculum and Assessment Division. Adjustments were made to the questionnaire form on the basis of comments received from the trial 'respondents'. The shortness of the questionnaire was deliberate in order to keep 'respondent burden' to a minimum.

Questionnaire forms were sent to all teachers of Years 5 and 7 in NT government and non-government urban primary schools (71 schools); office-based English advisory staff in both northern and southern regions; all regional superintendents and teachers at the Rapid Creek and rural (Humpty Doo) Language Centres (11 office-based and 'other establishments' staff). No names of respondents were required for the survey.

The number of forms sent to schools was based on a proportion of the total staff numbers for each.

Provision was made on the form for those teachers with multiple year level classes or 'family' groups including students in both Years 5 and 7 levels. Where teachers completed the form for both year levels, the response was counted as two separate responses.

Data recorded on the forms was entered into a database for storage and analysis.

A total of 86 teachers including 41 Year 5 and 40 Year 7 teachers from 25 government and non-government schools responded to the survey. Three respondents from the Year 5 group, and 2 from the Year 7 group supplied open-ended comments only. An additional 6 partially completed forms were received but no year level was identifiable for these. Given that the size of the survey population was not known, a best estimate of the return rate of responses was calculated as being approximately 40–45 per cent.

All percentages appearing in this paper are rounded.

DISCUSSION

The two main features of the booklets of moderated samples are the 'frameworks of descriptors' for each genre, and the graded annotated samples of student writing. Both of these can be used in tandem, and constitute the assessment 'instrument'. It was essential therefore to canvass teacher opinion regarding their use of both the 'frameworks of descriptors' and the annotated writing samples.

Non-users of the frameworks and the samples in the Year 5 and Year 7 groups were different individuals and did not represent any constant core of respondents.

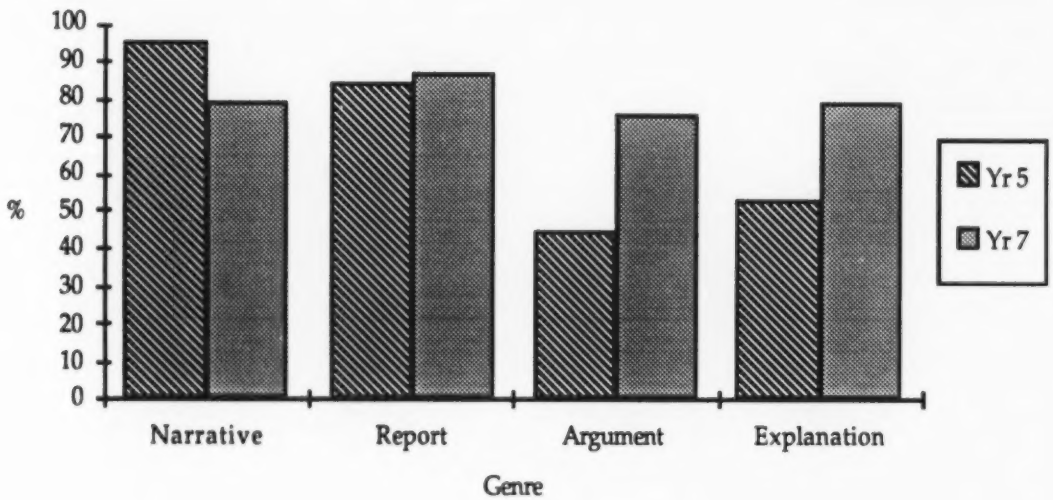
Use Made of Frameworks of Descriptors in 1991

Table 1 shows the amount of use made of the 'frameworks of descriptors' by the respondent group of teachers in 1991. The data presented in Table 1 and in Figure 1, show that the Year 5 teacher respondent group (38 out of 41 responded to this section of the questionnaire) made considerably more use of the narrative and report 'frameworks of descriptors' than they did of the argument and explanation frameworks. However, Year 7 teachers' use of the frameworks (38 out of 40 responded to this section of the questionnaire) was fairly consistent across all four genre.

Table 1: Usage of Frameworks of Descriptors in 1991 by Genre and Year Level

Genre	Yr 5 Teachers	Yr 5 Total Response	Yr 7 Teachers	Yr 7 Total Response
Narrative	36 (95%)	38	30 (79%)	38
Report	32 (84%)	38	33 (87%)	38
Argument	17 (45%)	38	29 (76%)	38
Explanation	20 (53%)	38	30 (79%)	38

Figure 1: Usage of Frameworks of Descriptors in 1991 by Genre and Year 5/7 Level



Degrees of Usefulness of the Frameworks of Descriptors

The survey questionnaire invited teachers to indicate on a three-point scale (*not useful / useful / very useful*), the degree to which the frameworks had been of use to them in assessing their students' writing in the four genre. Thirty-eight teachers at each of Years 5 and 7 responded to this section of the questionnaire.

Table 2 and Figures 2 and 3 describe the response from teachers at Years 5 and 7.

Table 2: Usefulness of Frameworks of Descriptors by Genre and Year 5/7 Level

Genre	Not useful (Year 5)	Useful (Year 5)	Very useful (Year 5)	Not useful (Year 7)	Useful (Year 7)	Very useful (Year 7)
Narrative	1	19	14	0	14	15
Report	1	12	18	0	15	17
Argument	1	4	13	0	12	17
Explanation	1	9	11	0	11	17

Information depicted on Table 2 and Figure 2 shows that only one teacher from the Year 5 respondent group indicated that the 'frameworks of descriptors' were *not useful*. The entire Year 7 teacher respondent group (see Figure 3) believed that the frameworks were either *useful* or *very useful* to them.

In terms of overall numbers, the narrative and report frameworks were rated as being the most useful by the Year 5 teacher group (see Figure 2). This is consistent with the level of use made of the frameworks and writing samples in those two genres.

Although fewer Year 5 teachers reported that they considered the argument and explanation frameworks useful, and given the smaller numbers that actually used them, proportionately the usefulness of the argument 'framework of descriptors' was rated highly by those who used it.

Interestingly, the report and argument frameworks were put consistently into the *very useful* category while the majority of Year 5 teachers indicated that the narrative and explanation frameworks were in the *useful* category.

Figure 2: Usefulness of Frameworks of Descriptors by Genre and Year 5 Level

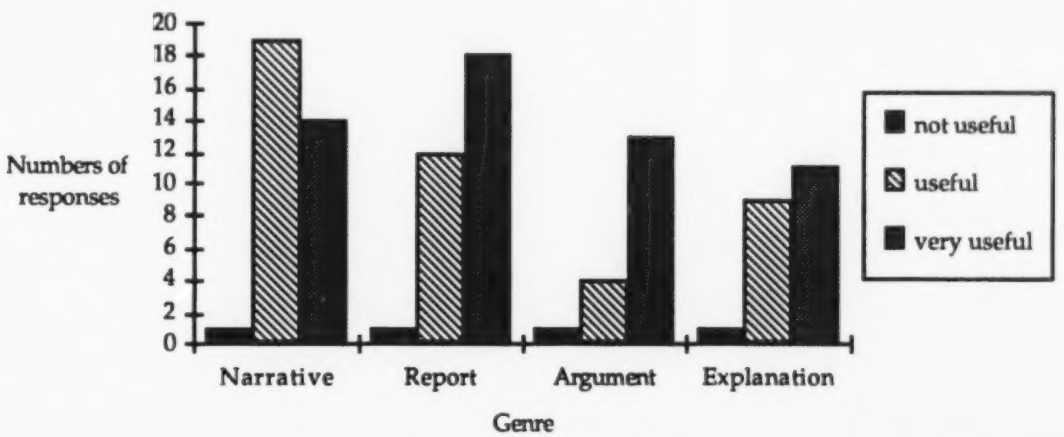


Figure 3: Usefulness of Frameworks of Descriptors by Genre and Year 7 Level

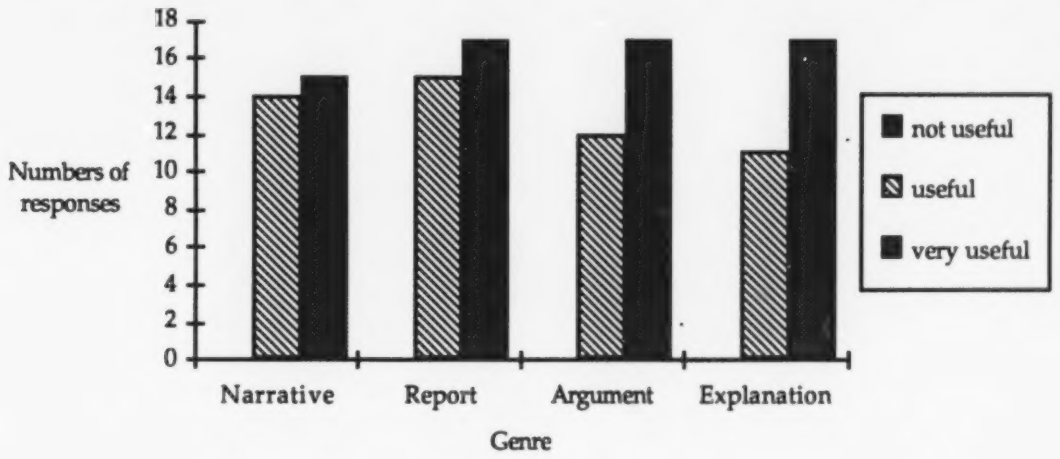


Figure 3 demonstrates that the entire Year 7 teacher respondent group believed that all four frameworks were either *useful* or *very useful*. The majority of this group indicated that the four frameworks were *very useful* rather than *useful* only. While there was little variation in the teachers' ratings of the usefulness of all four 'frameworks of descriptors', the explanation framework was the most highly rated in usefulness.

Overall numbers of responses showed that generally, the report framework was of the most use to the Year 7 teacher group. The trend of fairly evenly distributed usage of the frameworks in all four genres was reflected in the teachers' perceived usefulness of them.

Use Made of Writing Samples in 1991

Teachers were invited to indicate on the questionnaire, if they had used (in 1991) the moderated writing samples of writing in the four genre. Table 3 and Figure 4 summarise the responses by the 38 Year 5 and 38 Year 7 teachers who responded to this section of the questionnaire.

Table 3: Usage of Writing Samples in 1991 by Genre and Year Level

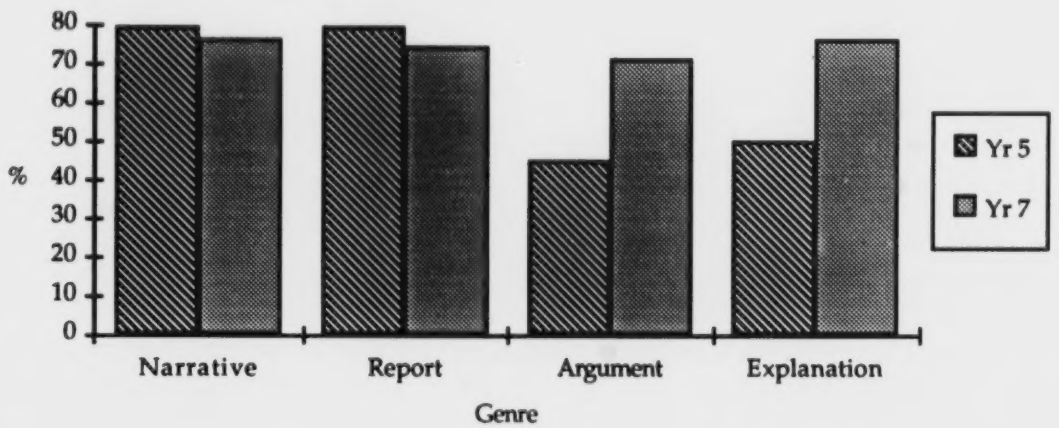
Genre	Yr 5 Teachers	Yr 5 Total Response	Yr 7 Teachers	Yr 7 Total Response
Narrative	30 (79%)	38	29 (76%)	38
Report	30 (79%)	38	28 (74%)	38
Argument	17 (45%)	38	27 (71%)	38
Explanation	19 (50%)	38	29 (76%)	38

Seventy-nine per cent of the Year 5 teacher group used narrative samples and 79 per cent used the report samples. This was in contrast with the 45 per cent that used the argument samples and the 50 per cent that reported using the explanation ones. This pattern was consistent with their usage of the 'frameworks of descriptors' (see Figure 1).

Usage of samples in the Year 7 respondent group showed that 76 per cent used narrative, 74 per cent used report, 71 per cent used argument and 76 per cent used explanation samples. Figure 4 shows that there was very little variation in Year 7 teachers' use of the writing samples in all four genres.

Year 7 teachers' pattern of usage of both the frameworks and the writing samples (see Figure 1) was highly consistent. This same degree of consistency between use of frameworks and samples was present for the Year 5 teacher group also.

Figure 4: Usage of Writing Samples in 1991 by Genre and Year 5/7 Level



Degrees of Usefulness of the Writing Samples

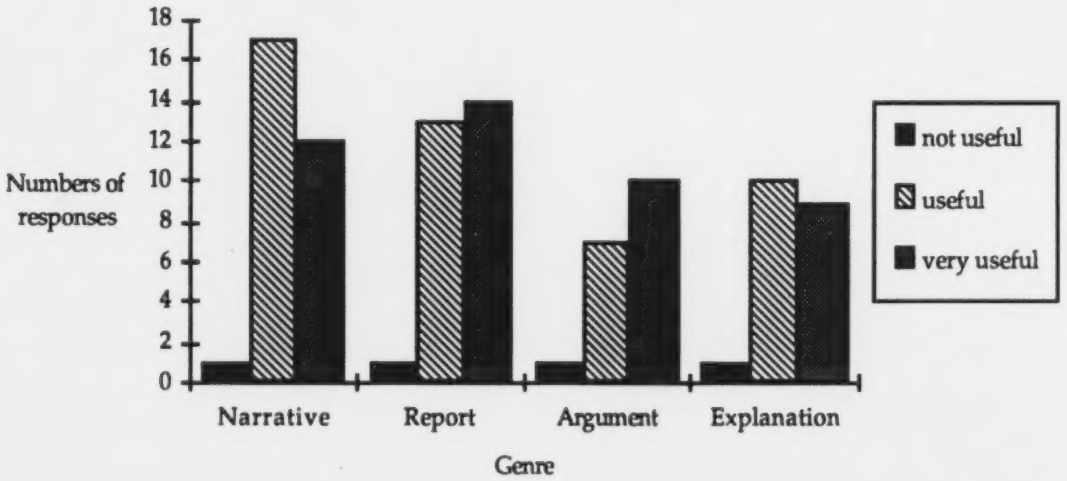
Table 4: Usefulness of Writing Samples by Genre and Year 5/7 Level

Genre	Not useful (Year 5)	Useful (Year 5)	Very useful (Year 5)	Not useful (Year 7)	Useful (Year 7)	Very useful (Year 7)
Narrative	1*	17	12	0	12	17
Report	1*	13	14	0	14	15
Argument	1*	7	10	0	12	16
Explanation	1*	10	9	0	11	13

*The one teacher who did not believe the writing samples to be of use was the same respondent who expressed this belief about the usefulness of the Year 5 'frameworks of descriptors'.

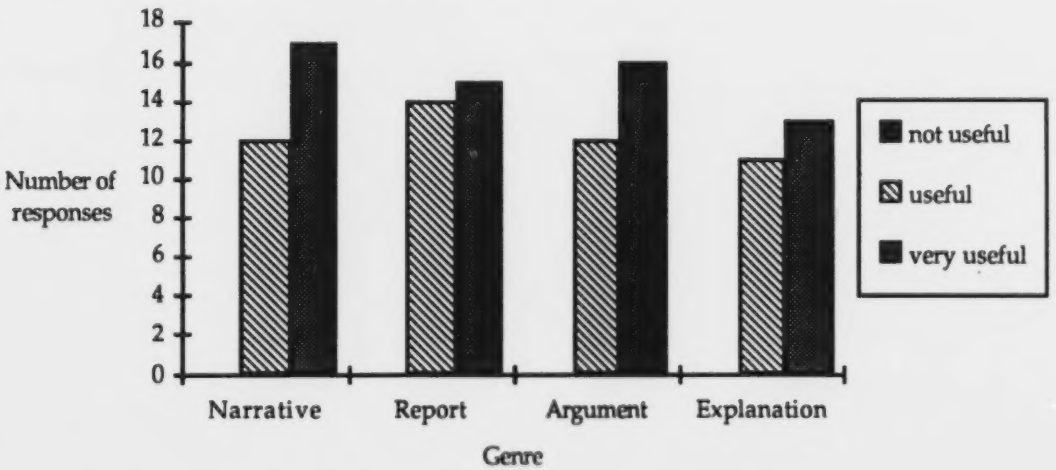
Reference to Figure 5 reveals that Year 5 teachers consistently rated writing samples in the narrative and report genres as of the most overall use. Samples in the narrative genre were the most used by Year 5 teachers but were rated as *useful* only. Samples in the report, argument and explanation genres were less used than those in the narrative genre but were regarded by those who used them as being *very useful*.

Figure 5: Usefulness of Writing Samples by Genre and Year 5 Level



The entire Year 7 group of teachers indicated that the writing samples for all four genre were either *useful* or *very useful*. More Year 7 teachers regarded the samples as being *very useful* rather than just *useful* (see Table 4 and Figure 6).

Figure 6: Usefulness of Writing Samples by Genre and Year 7 Level



Genres for Future Booklets of Moderated Samples of Students' Writing

The questionnaire invited teachers to nominate the genres of student writing samples they would wish to see moderated in the future, for the purpose of compiling them into booklets similar to those already in use.

Of the 86 returns, 34 recorded a response to this question even though some of the suggestions included requests for booklets of exemplar pieces of writing that are not generally regarded as 'genres'. Some of these included letter writing, responses to literature, diaries, book reviews and drama/script writing. This accounted for approximately 29 per cent of the group that responded to this question.

Eighteen per cent of the respondent group indicated a preference for having access to a booklet of moderated samples in the procedure genre. Twelve per cent suggested that it would be useful to have moderated samples in the recount genre, while six per cent of the respondent group believed that the genres of writing already moderated were 'adequate'. Approximately nine per cent of this group believed that booklets of student writing samples should be compiled in 'all' genres.

Twenty-one per cent of the respondents welcomed the opportunity to have access to a booklet of moderated narrative poetry in 1992.

General Comments

The two most notable features of teacher response to the 'General Comments' section of the questionnaire were:

- the considerable number of teachers who were not aware of the existence of the booklets of writing samples until receiving the survey questionnaire

- the number of teachers who commended the booklets and declared them to be a useful resource.

With regard to the efficacy of the booklets, one teacher's comments were that they were 'extremely useful in staff development exercises, as well as for classroom practice, planning, implementation and evaluation'.

It appeared that a number of teachers were not only using the booklets as assessment instruments but were using them as teaching resources as well. Some teachers indicated that they had made copies of the 'high' competency samples available to their students to use as models of good writing in particular genres. One respondent suggested that more examples of 'high' competency samples be included in the booklets.

Examples of other comments offered were:

- that one draft of each moderated sample be included in the booklets to illustrate development of each of the final scripts

- that there should be one copy of each booklet made available to every teacher of Years 5 and 7

- that some additional samples of writing in the argument and explanation genres would be useful.

The questionnaire gave teachers an opportunity to elaborate on any aspect of the existing booklets that they considered to be of no use. Two of the 86 respondents made use of this section.

One respondent reported that he/she did not make use of samples rated as 'poor'. The other believed that the annotations accompanying the report on 'Spider' (*Children's Writing in the Northern Territory: Moderated Examples of Reports and Narratives from Students in Years 5 and 7*, p.11), were of limited value because they did not adequately explain why the sample was rated as 'poor'.

Conclusions

The evaluation carried out by Richards in 1989 reported that teachers of Years 5 and 7 in urban schools believed the booklets then in existence were 'good assessment support material' and therefore useful to them. From data and information gathered from the 1991 survey, it was clear that teachers still believed the booklets containing the moderated samples of writing and the 'frameworks of descriptors' to be a useful resource for teaching and for assessment of student writing.

It was obvious from the responses that many teachers, for one reason or another, had not had access to personal copies of the booklets, or did not know of their existence. This situation is of some concern, and it is obvious that strategies need to be developed to help address the issue.

Another notable feature that emerged from the data was that of the use teachers made of 'frameworks of descriptors' and writing samples in the argument and explanation genres. The data showed that Year 7 teachers made more use of these, comparatively, than did Year 5 teachers. However, those Year 5 teachers who did use them, rated their overall usefulness highly. The Year 5 teachers who indicated that they did not use the argument and explanation materials, did not record in the space provided on the survey form that they believed these materials to be of no use. The conclusions that may be drawn from this are that:

- Year 5 teachers worked less with their students in the argument and explanation genres than did Year 7 teachers

- a significant group of Year 5 teachers believed the materials in the two genres to be of no use but did not state this in the space provided on the questionnaire.

Given the number of teachers who indicated a desire to have access to moderated samples of student writing in a variety of other literary and non-literary forms, consideration could be given to this (subject to available resources) in future.

Interest was shown by some respondents to this survey in booklets of samples being produced for year levels other than those involved in the Primary Assessment Program. Some urban and rural primary schools have taken the initiative to compile collections of writing samples for all year levels, other than Years 5 and 7, within their own schools or regions.

Informal discussions with teachers revealed a growing awareness of the importance they attach to having access to collections of moderated samples of early childhood student writing. While these discussions were outside the scope of this survey, the views expressed by the teachers concerned are nonetheless valid.

With the full implementation of the new T-10 English curriculum in urban schools in 1992, annual system-wide moderation of student writing at Years 5 and 7, and the increased trend towards a genre-based approach to the teaching of writing, a reasonable prediction would be that teacher use of booklets of moderated samples of student writing in a range of genres will become increasingly widespread in Northern Territory schools.

PRIMARY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM: WRITING MODERATION BOOKLET SURVEY

TO ALL TEACHERS OF YEARS 5 and 7 The purpose of this survey is to determine: (a) the usefulness of current writing moderation booklets and (b) what types of booklets teachers would prefer to use in the future. Your completion of this survey form will provide valuable information that will assist with the development of materials to meet the ongoing needs of schools. Please return completed forms NO LATER THAN **11 OCTOBER 1991.** Forms to be returned to: **Ms Jeannie Abbott, Curriculum & Assessment Division , GPO Box 4821 DARWIN NT 0801 (Telephone 89 6184 Facsimile 41 1120)** *PLEASE TICK THE YEAR LEVEL/S YOU ARE CURRENTLY TEACHING:* **Year 5 / Year 7**

Booklet title/year of publication

"Children's Writing in the Northern Territory: Moderated Examples of Reports and Narratives from Students in Years 5 and 7"
1987

Which frameworks of descriptors have you used in 1991 ? (Tick)

Narrative Yr 5 ☐ Yr 7 ☐ — **How useful were they to you? (Tick)** Not useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

Report Yr 5 ☐ Yr 7 ☐ — Not useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

Which samples have you used in 1991 ? (Tick)

Narrative Yr 5 ☐ Yr 7 ☐ — Not useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

Report Yr 5 ☐ Yr 7 ☐ — Not useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

"Children's Writing in the Northern Territory: Moderated Examples of Argument and Explanation from Years 5 and 7"
1989

Which frameworks of descriptors have you used in 1991 ? (Tick)

Argument Yr 5 ☐ Yr 7 ☐ — **How useful were they to you? (Tick)** Not useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

Explanation Yr 5 ☐ Yr 7 ☐ — Not useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

Which samples have you used in 1991 ? (Tick)

Argument Yr 5 ☐ Yr 7 ☐ — Not useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

Explanation Yr 5 ☐ Yr 7 ☐ — Not useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐

*(**Note:** A booklet of narrative poetry samples in ballad form will be available in 1992 for teachers of Years 5 and 7 .)*

Are there any other genre/s for which you would like to see a booklet of samples produced? If so, please state which. .....

If any aspect of either booklet was not useful to you, please state why not. .....

General comments? .....

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INPUT.